



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Carson City District Office  
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Carson City, NV 89706-0638



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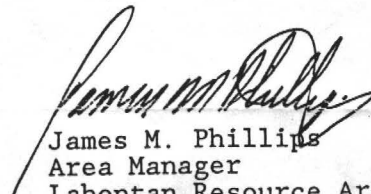
JUL 5 1994

Dear Reviewer:

Enclosed you will find a copy of the Mountain Well - La Plata Allotment Evaluation for your review and comments. The review period for this document ends August 5, 1994.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely yours,



James M. Phillips  
Area Manager  
Lahontan Resource Area

1 Enclosure  
1. Allotment Evaluation

## Mountain Well - La Plata Allotment Evaluation

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## ALLOTMENT EVALUATION SUMMARY

### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Allotment Name & Number: Mountain Well-La Plata - #03039
- B. Permittee: Ira H. Kent & Silver Range Ranch
- C. Evaluation Period: From 1983 to 1993
- D. Selective Management Category & Priority: "M" - maintain

### II. INITIAL STOCKING LEVEL

#### A. Livestock Use

- 1. Adjudicated AUMs
  - a. Total Preference: 8700 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) cattle
  - b. Suspended: 0
  - c. Active: 8700
  - d. Exchange of use: 100 AUMs with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- 2. Season of Use  
March 1 to September 30 and November 11 to February 28
- 3. Kind and Class of Livestock  
725 cattle
- 4. Percent Federal Range  
100% Federal Range

#### B. Wild Horse and Burro Use

- 1. Population:  
Approximately 14 head of wild horses use the allotment. There are no wild burros within the allotment.
- 2. Herd Use Areas:  
Seven percent of the allotment is within the South Stillwater Herd Management Area (HMA). The entire HMA (9,940 acres) is within the allotment.

#### C. Wildlife Use

- 1. Species: Mule deer
  - a. Reasonable numbers: 20 deer yearlong (87 AUMs)
  - b. Key or critical management areas: The Stillwater Habitat Management Plan (HMP) identifies the Table Mountain area as key

male deer winter range.

2. Species: Bighorn sheep
  - a. Reasonable numbers: 190
  - b. Key or critical management areas: The Stillwater HMP identifies the northeast corner of the allotment (Little Box, Big Box and Freeman Canyons) as a key bighorn sheep area. Virtually all of the Stillwaters is important sheep habitat.
3. Species: Chukar partridge
  - a. Reasonable numbers: Chukar populations fluctuate yearly depending upon the weather. Therefore, reasonable numbers cannot be predicted.
  - b. Key or critical management areas: No key areas identified.
4. Species: Pronghorn antelope
  - a. Reasonable numbers: None established.
  - b. Key or critical management areas: Pronghorn have been observed on Table Mountain. No key areas have been delineated.

### III. ALLOTMENT PROFILE

#### A. Description

The allotment is located approximately 20 miles northeast of Fallon, Nevada. The topography in the winter range ranges from flat to rolling hills. The topography in the Stillwater Mountains (the spring, summer and fall range) is typically steep and rugged.

#### B. Acreage

1. Total : 137,771 acres - Mountain Well-La Plata Allotment Management Plan (AMP) (1983)

2. Pastures (acres and season of use):

Pasture 1:	53,760 acres	11/10 - 4/15
Pasture 2:	25,190	4/1 - 6/10
Pasture 3:	20,071	4/1 - 6/10
Pasture 4:	28,450	6/11 - 9/30
Pasture 5:	<u>10,300</u>	4/21 - 9/30
Total:	137,771	

(La Platte is Pasture 3)

#### C. Allotment Specific Objectives

1. Land Use Plan (LUP) Objectives (Lahontan RMP - 1983)
  - a. Short Term
    - 1). Initially, manage livestock at existing levels.
    - 2). Initially, manage for wild horses and their habitat in

- current herd management areas at present population levels.
- 3). Initially, manage habitat for existing numbers of big game, while recognizing reasonable numbers as a management goal.

b. Long Term :

- 1). Improve the condition of the public rangelands so as to improve productivity for all rangeland values.
- 2). Maintain and improve wildlife habitat, including riparian/stream habitat, and reduce habitat conflicts while providing for other appropriate resource uses.

2. Rangeland Program Summary (RPS) Update Objectives (1989)

a. Short Term

- 1). Maintain utilization not to exceed 55 percent on identified key species on upland key areas. Initially allow 8,700 AUMs of livestock use.
- 2). Limit utilization to 55% on identified key species in identified mule deer habitat and identified bighorn sheep habitat.
- 3). Limit utilization to 55% current year's growth in riparian areas.
- 4). Initially provide approximately 300 AUMs of forage for approximately 25 head of wild horses.

b. Long Term

- 1). Maintain existing ecological condition and trend.
- 2). Manage identified mule deer habitat to maintain fair (26-50 rating) or better to support 18 deer from 5/1 to 10/31 and 20 deer yearlong, 87 AUMs reasonable numbers.
- 3). Maintain or improve identified bighorn sheep habitat at a minimum rating of 73 to help support 100 sheep yearlong, 240 AUMs reasonable numbers, in the Stillwater HMP area.
- 4). Manage riparian areas to achieve and maintain late seral ecological condition. Maintain or improve willow and aspen stands to have at least 20% of all stems produce over five feet in height (six feet for aspen).
- 5). Maintain or improve wild horse habitat consistent with wildlife and livestock objectives. Maintain or improve free roaming behavior of wild horses by protecting or enhancing wild horse home ranges. Maintain or improve wild horse habitat by assuring that all waters remain open to use by wild horses.

3. Activity Plan Objectives: The Mountain Well-La Plata Allotment Management Plan (AMP) identifies the following objectives.

a. Livestock forage:

- 1). Produce on a continuing basis a sufficient amount of usable forage to satisfy the qualified demand (3700 AUMs).

b. Watershed stabilization:

- 1). Improve the balance between vegetation, soil and water, by increasing and improving the vegetative cover.
- 2). In the winter range - increase cover from 13% to 20%, and increase the percent grass composition from 20% to 25%.
- 3). In the spring range - increase cover from 15% to 20%, and increase per cent grass composition from 20% to 30%, and provide for reversing the apparent downward trend in this area.
- 4). In the summer and fall ranges - increase cover from 25% to 30%, and increase the per cent grass composition from 35%.

c. Wildlife forage:

- 1). Provide forage and other habitat requirements for a low density resident population of 130 to 200 mule deer on a year-round basis.
- 2). Provide habitat protection for sage grouse in the higher reaches of the Stillwater Mountains.
- 3). Provide and protect adequate watering sources in this prime chuckar partridge and mourning dove habitat to prevent possible over-harvest by eliminating concentrations of birds at a few water sources.

d. Recreation opportunities

- 1). Provide hunting opportunities during the normal fall seasons with a minimum amount of livestock disturbances and hunter-caused livestock losses.

4. Threatened and Endangered species (T&E): There are no known T&E plants or animals in the allotment.

D. Key Species Identification

The AMP identifies Indian ricegrass (Oryzopsis hymenoides) as a key species.

#### IV. MANAGEMENT EVALUATION

A. Purpose

To determine if present management is adequate to meet the allotment objectives set in the RPS and AMP.

B. Summary of Studies Data

1. Actual Use

- a. Livestock: Under the conditions of the Mountain Well - La Plata AMP, the permittee is billed based upon his actual use submitted at the end of the grazing year in accordance with the AMP. Therefore, on this allotment, billed use is the same as

actual use. Numbers shown are AUMs.

1992: 3,778  
1991: 6,730  
1990: 6,702  
1989: 2,528  
1988: 6,422  
1987: 4,604  
1986: 5,145  
1985: 6,456  
1984: 6,624  
1983: 7,343

b. Wildlife

Mule deer: The Mountain Well-La Plata Allotment comprises approximately 3% of the total area of Game Management Area 18. There is no specific wildlife use data available for this allotment. According to Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) Big Game Status and Quota Recommendations Reports, no deer were observed in the Stillwater Range during post season helicopter flights in 1989, yet nine deer were killed by hunters in the area surveyed. Mule deer population figures available for Management Area 18 estimate numbers varying from 1,213 deer in 1991 to 653 in 1993. By prorating strictly on area, it is grossly estimated that 16 to 36 deer may have occupied the allotment in recent years. This is down from a historic high of 80 in 1986.

According to the permittee, there is one herd of mule deer that summers on the ranch, from approximately May 1 until about December 1. They winter in the area of West Lee Canyon and Black Point. This herd consists of between 125 and 150 animals, with as many as 64 seen on the base property. There is another herd that summers on Table Mountain, and in the vicinity of Shaley Peak, Slaughter Peak and East Lee Canyon. This herd winters in La Platte and East Lee Canyons and near Cain Spring. He feels that Table Mountain is probably key deer summer range and not winter range, as the snow would be too deep.

Bighorn sheep: Most recent estimates of desert bighorn sheep numbers for the Stillwater Range (NDOW Big Game Status and Quota Recommendations, 1991, 1992) indicate a population of 143 bighorn sheep. Again, prorating by area alone, it is estimated that the allotment supports 49 sheep.

c. Wild Horse: Since 1975, the horse population has varied from a high of 18 (1975) animals to a low of 14 (1993). Because of the relatively dense population of mountain lions in the Stillwaters, it is believed that lion predation on foals is maintaining the horse population at these levels. Also, because of the small size of the HMA and its proximity to the

Clan Alpine HMA and North Stillwater HMA, it is possible that intraspecific interactions among the horses lead to dispersal into the nearby HMAs.

The grazing permittee has complained that the horses are drifting outside the HMA.

2. Precipitation: Precipitation is from the Fallon Experimental Station. This data is fairly representative of precipitation occurring on the winter pasture, but precipitation occurring on the Stillwater Mountains is considerably higher. No data is available to reflect the summer pasture.

Figures shown are inches. (T = trace). The station normal is 4.88.

Totals:

1992: 4.10	1987: 5.27
1991: 3.25	1986: 2.55
1990: 5.69	1985: 4.94
1989: 4.82	1984: 3.76
1988: 5.83	1983: 8.45

3. Utilization

Utilization data is limited for most years, due to the low priority of this allotment. The last time the entire allotment was mapped was 1984-85. The winter range was extensively mapped in 1991-92.

- a. Key Areas:

Key Area #1; T. 18 N., R. 32 E., sec. 21, SE $\frac{1}{4}$  NE $\frac{1}{4}$   
1991-92: mapped heavy (61-80%)  
1984-85: mapped heavy  
1983-84: mapped moderate (41-60%)

Key Area #2; T. 19 N., R. 33 E., sec. 33, SW $\frac{1}{4}$  SE $\frac{1}{4}$   
1984-85: mapped heavy  
1983-84: mapped heavy

- b. Use Pattern Mapping (% acres in each utilization class):

1984-85: slight -	20%
light -	30%
moderate -	37%
heavy -	13%
severe -	0%



1983-84: slight - 21%  
 light - 28%  
 moderate - 33%  
 heavy - 17%  
 severe - 0%

4. Trend

- a. Key Area : There are two key area frequency transects, both were established in 1984. These were read again in 1987 and 1992. Results are as follows:

Trend plot #1 - Diamond Canyon (T. 18 N., R. 32 E., SE $\frac{1}{4}$  NE $\frac{1}{4}$  sec. 21):

There was a significant decrease in the frequency of big sagebrush (Artr) between 1987 and 1992 (43 to 30%).

Trend Plot #3 - La Platte (T. 19 N., R. 33 E., SW $\frac{1}{4}$  SE $\frac{1}{4}$  sec 33):  
 Artr showed a significant decline from 1987 to 1992 (60 to 47%).

- b. There are 10 3' X 3' photo trend plots. These were read most recently in 1982. No apparent change is evident from the photographs.

5. Ecological Status:

<u>Early</u>	<u>Mid Seral</u>	<u>Late Seral</u>	<u>Potential Natural Community</u>
8%	51%	40%	1%
10,549	65,888	51,459	354 acres

Forage Condition (woodlands and seedings)

<u>Poor</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Excellent</u>
1297	3100	0	0

6. Wildlife Habitat: No habitat data available, however the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDCW) yearly status reports indicate bighorn sheep populations increased 24% in the entire Stillwater Range between 1989 and 1992. Total sheep population for the Stillwaters was estimated at 143 head in 1992.
7. Riparian / Fisheries Habitat: No data available on riparian. There are no fish on the allotment. The permittee had planted some in several creeks, but they did not establish.
8. Wild Horse Habitat: Water and forage availability are good.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

### A. Allotment Objectives

#### 1. RPS

##### a. Short Term

- 1). Not met. Utilization has apparently exceeded 55% at both key areas. No utilization transects were run at the key areas themselves, but the transects were included within an area mapped as heavy. Overall, the allotment is not receiving excessive use. Approximately 50% of the allotment receives slight or light use, and no areas have been mapped as severe. This indicates a distribution problem, rather than an overstocking problem.
- 2). Met. No specific utilization studies were conducted within the key areas for mule deer and bighorn sheep. However, for the area identified as key bighorn sheep area, in 1983, this area was mapped as light use; in 1984, it was mapped as moderate. Table Mountain, the area identified as key mule deer range, was mapped as moderate use in both 1983 and 1984. Since the introduction of bighorn sheep onto the Stillwaters, the permittee has voluntarily kept cattle out of Coyote, Pete, Sheep Creek, and Springer Canyons.
- 3). Unknown. Although no permanent riparian studies have been established, visual observations indicate some springs and associated riparian areas receive greater than 55% utilization.
- 4). Met, although current numbers are only 14 head.

##### b. Long Term

- 1). Unknown. No ecological condition studies have been done. Trend appears to be static. Frequency trend studies indicate that big sagebrush has declined. If the key areas have, in fact, received heavy use to the detriment of desirable grass species, these species should show a decline while big sagebrush should be increasing. This decline in sagebrush may be due to an infestation of a moth that the permittee has reported. At Key Area #3, the key species is below the 20% minimum frequency, even with a 40" frame, so any changes in frequency of this species would not be statistically reliable. This also indicates the key area was not properly located.
- 2). Met. Based on prorated NDOW population estimates, 20 to 36 deer may use the allotment yearlong.
- 3). Met. NDOW population estimates indicate there are approximately 143 sheep in the Stillwater HMP area.
- 4). Unknown. No riparian studies have been conducted.
- 5). Met.

### 2. Activity Plan

#### a. Livestock forage

- 1). Met. Due to fluctuations in livestock numbers and the ongoing drought conditions, the permittee has used less

than 8700 AUMs.

b. Watershed stabilization

1-4). Unknown. No studies were established to measure this objective.

c. Wildlife forage

1). Unknown. Deer numbers listed in the objective are 62-150% higher than those projected from the historic high recorded in 1986. This suggests that deer numbers in the activity plan were incorrect.

2). Not met. The sage grouse population was eliminated due to over-hunting in 1961.

3). Met. The permittee has developed many water sources that are available to chukar and doves.

d. Recreational opportunities

1). Met. The permittee removes the majority of livestock prior to the deer hunting season. Additional non-consumptive recreation is also available on the allotment.

B. Other Issues and Concerns

1. There are areas in the winter range where the Indian ricegrass plants are grazed year after year to the same level, creating accumulations of old litter that is not palatable to cattle. Cattle then only graze to this level, further perpetuating the situation.

2. The authorizations in the Section 3 file has shown the period of use on this allotment as 3/1 to 2/28. This is not the case. Cattle are off the allotment between 10/1 and 11/9. This allow the permittee to wean calves, keeps them off the public range during most of the hunting season, and prevents the cattle from moving onto the winter range too early. This should be corrected in the BLM files.

3. The AMP calls for spring use (4/1 to 6/10) in the La-Plata Pasture (#3). The permittee has used it as part of the summer range, which keeps the cattle off the Indian ricegrass during the critical growing season. The permittee would like to permanently move the turnout to 6/11.

4. The AMP identifies Pasture 5 as spring and summer use, 4/21 to 9/30. This is the heifer pasture, and the permittee uses it beginning June 10. The permittee would like to permanently move the turnout to this later date.

## VI. TECHNICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. Allotment Objectives

#### 1. RPS Objectives

##### a. Short Term

- 1). Time and topography makes mapping utilization on the entire allotment unfeasible. Establish priorities for utilization studies. Identify a key species for the upland areas in the summer pasture. In most cases, this would be Idaho fescue (Festuca idahoensis), although it is found only in five canyons, and only on the north slopes of these. Improve distribution in the winter range.
- 2). Establish locations in the key ranges for both bighorn sheep and mule deer to read utilization, as priority areas identified in 1), above.
- 3). Move salt blocks away from waters. Identify key species in the riparian areas. Establish permanent riparian monitoring studies, as time and funding allows. Replace the riparian objectives with the following, in accordance with the Bureau's Riparian Wetlands Initiative for the 1990's: Achieve and maintain proper functioning condition on 75% of all riparian areas within the allotment by 1997. Some springs are fenced, however it may be impractical to build and maintain additional spring enclosures.
- 4). Remove those horses outside the HMA.

##### b. Long Term

- 1). Continue reading frequency trend studies every eight years instead of five. Eliminate Key Area #3 and establish another key area in the summer range where the key species meets the minimum of 20% frequency. When funding allows, conduct new ecological condition surveys.
- 2). Establish mule deer studies as funding allows.
- 3). Establish big horn sheep studies as funding allows.
- 4). Establish permanent riparian monitoring studies as funding allows. Replace the riparian objectives with the following, in accordance with the Bureau's Riparian Wetlands Initiative for the 1990's: Achieve and maintain proper functioning condition of all riparian areas within the allotment.
- 5). See a.4). above.

#### 2. Activity Plan Objectives

Replace the AMP objectives with those listed in the RPS Update. This will ensure that objectives are measurable and in accordance with the Nevada Monitoring Handbook. This would include the elimination of the watershed and recreation objectives.

Mule deer numbers in the RPS are more reflective of habitat capability. Sage grouse have been essentially absent since 1961, so this objective should be eliminated.

B. Other Issues and Concerns

1. Work with the permittee to identify those areas where cattle could be concentrated. Authorize and encourage the use of salt and/or supplement blocks in order to break up old accumulations of litter.
2. Update Section 3 files and computer files to reflect correct periods of use.
- 3 & 4. Change AMP to reflect actual seasons of use.

VII. CONSULTATION

A. Outside BLM

Ira H. Kent, grazing permittee

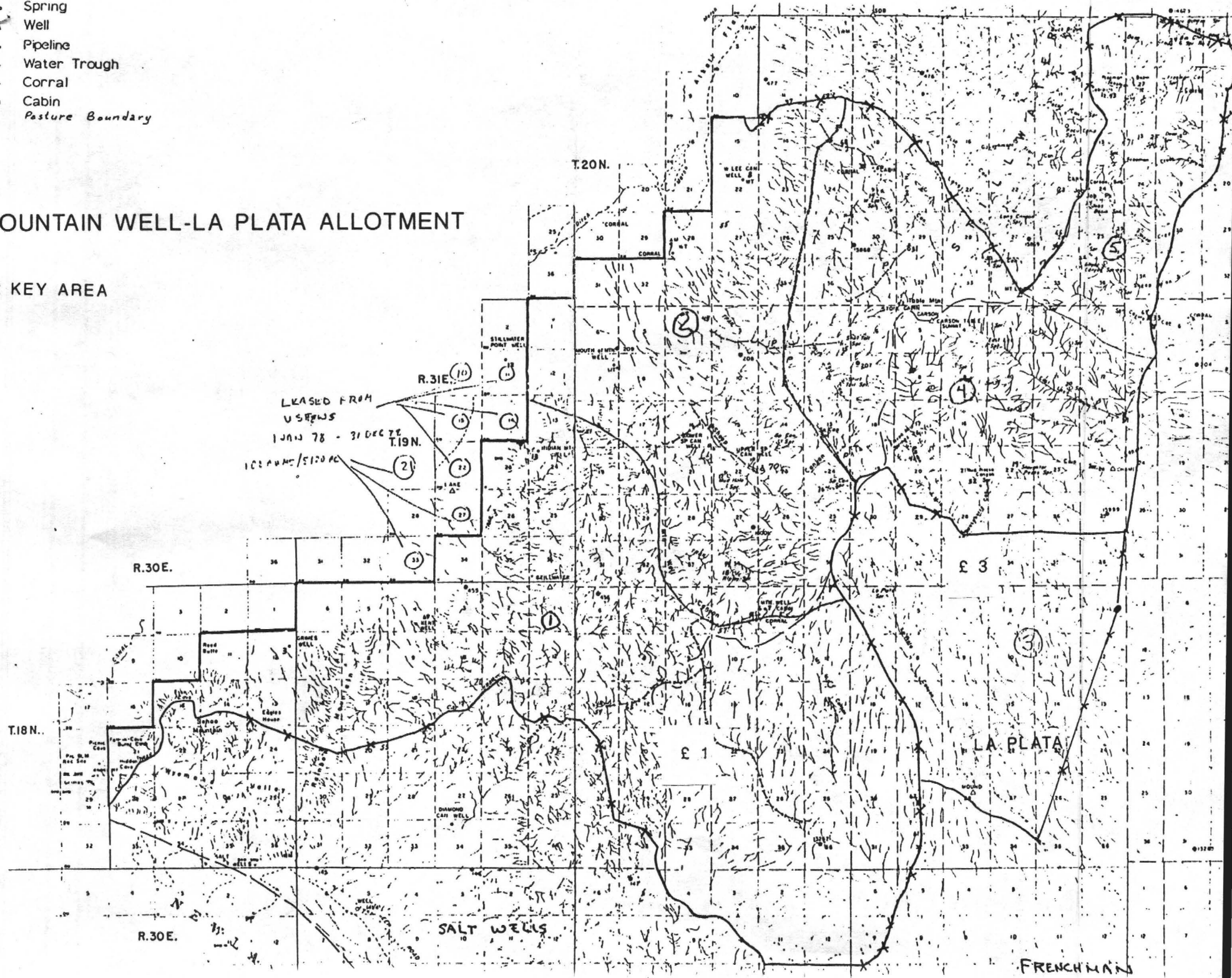
B. Inside BLM

R.H. Wolfe, Supervisory Range Con., Lahontan Resource Area  
Jim Ramakka, Lahontan Resource Area Wildlife Biologist  
Jim DeLaureal, Lahontan Resource Area Soils Scientist  
John Axtell, Lahontan Resource Area Wild Horse Specialist

- Spring
- Well
- Pipeline
- ∩ Water Trough
- Corral
- Cabin
- ▭ Pasture Boundary

# MOUNTAIN WELL-LA PLATA ALLOTMENT

£ KEY AREA



7/12/1994



July 12, 1994

Mr. Mike Phillips  
Lahontan Resource Area  
Bureau of Land Management  
1535 Hot Springs Rd., Suite 300  
Carson City, Nevada 89706-0638

Subject: Mountain Well - La Plata Allotment

Dear Mr. Phillips:

Thank you for consulting the Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses concerning this allotment. Though wild horse numbers are limited in the Stillwater Mountains, we are concerned with the condition of their habitat.

In general, we found a lack of monitoring and evaluation of riparian habitat on this allotment. This oversight was shared in the adjacent White Cloud Allotment Evaluation. In light of the land use plan now being about 10 years old, we encourage the District to evaluate this critical habitat for the final evaluation and multiple use decisions.

We look forward to reviewing the final documents.

Sincerely,

CATHERINE BARCOMB  
Executive Director